



## **Federal Lands Committee**

by **Troy Smith**

DENVER, CO (Feb. 3, 2006) — Controversy over grazing of public lands is nothing new. Congress was arguing over grazing fees as early as 1916. Today, roughly 20% of the U.S. cow herd is located in 11 western states, with most running on ranches that include grazing lands under the auspices of the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

NCBA's Federal Lands Committee wrestles with issues stemming from the need to balance ranchers' needs with the goals of each government agency.

While meeting during the Cattle Industry Convention, the committee heard reports from USFS and BLM representatives. Agency officials voiced commitment to management for multiple uses of public lands, including livestock grazing. They admitted that friction between grazing permit holders and the custodial agencies often stems from overzealous field personnel whose own biases influence their interpretation of grazing land management objectives.

Sallie Collins, USFS Associate Chief, calls public ranchers important partners in the

management of grazing lands that are underappreciated by the public. Collins favors development of incentives to reward ranchers that practice good stewardship and management to improve their grazing allotments.

Committee business included proposals for two new NCBA resolutions. The first was designed to make judicial review of conflicts between the BLM and permit holders a last resort. Since there exists no statute requiring exhaustion of all possible administrative remedies prior to judicial review, the resolution would urge Congress to adopt legislation requiring any appellant to pursue resolution through administrative remedies before considering judicial review under the Administrative Procedure Act.

The second resolution responds to increasing attempts, by extremist anti-livestock groups to seek court injunctions to stop permit holders from exercising their right to graze livestock on permitted allotments before litigation or agency procedures are completed. Successful blockage of injunctions would prevent ranchers from being forced to remove cattle prior to a final ruling and resolution of a specific conflict.



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